**Strengthening Democratic Networks in Decentralization and Local Governance**

**Final Report**
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SUBMITTED TO:

*Mr. Lane Smith*
Education for Development and Democracy Initiative (EDDI)
USAID Leland Coordinator

DEVELOPED BY:

*Ms. Rebecca (Becky) Gadell, Project Manager and Eileen Reynolds, Deputy Project Manager*
RTI, Information and Communication Technology (ICT)
3040 Cornwallis Road, P.O. Box 12194, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-2194

**Sustaining the Dialogue on Democratic Decentralization and Local Governance University in Africa**

**Introduction**

This final report examines the potential for long-term sustainability of the Dialogue on Democratic Decentralization (DDialogue) and Local Governance University (LGU).  RTI provides a summary of background and results, key lessons, and description of a sustainability approach of two-year duration. The approach centers on:

1.  Integration of DDialogue and LGU into existing African institutions

2.  Facilitation of public-private-NGO partnerships to promote reliable and affordable Internet access beyond capital/major cities

3.  Increased emphasis on communication and promotion, including introduction of DDialogue throughout the EDDI partner network.

**Background and Results: DDialogue and LGU**

*DDialogue* is an in-person and on-line network of decentralization champions in Francophone and Anglophone Africa committed to increasing:

*   Exchange of useful decentralization information and perspectives between local and central level peers, within and across sectors, within participating countries, and across regions of Africa

*   Local government effectiveness, particularly in the area of public finance, local revenue generation, and citizen involvement in local governance

*   Local level engagement in decentralization policy development and implementation.

DDialogue is located on the web at www.ddialogue.org.

Implemented by RTI, DDialogue was born in 1997-99 in Francophone Africa with initial support from the Leland Initiative. The Education for Development and Democracy Initiative (EDDI) has supported DDialogue in Francophone and Anglophone Africa from October 1999 through November 2001.

Developed through in-person roundtables and on-line sharing of information, experience, and views via the web and e-mail, Francophone DDialogue engages participants – primarily from local government support organizations, and central government ministries in six countries – Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, and, Senegal. DDialogue has extended its reach through regional institutions, including the Municipal Development Program (PDM) based in Cotonou, Benin, and the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS). For the past two years, RTI has worked to broaden and deepen the network and transfer Francophone DDialogue leadership, management, and operations (including web hosting) to the PDM. The formal transfer of all responsibilities from PDM, including web hosting, occured in November 2001. The website www.ddialoguefr.org became operational on the PDM server by July 2002. The reason for the delay was that PDM was waiting for an extended period to obtain a permanent leased line connection to the Internet to replace the VSAT connection that had proved unreliable.

Based on lessons learned and advances made in Internet access, RTI facilitated the Anglophone DDialogue start-up in Ghana, 1999-2001. During this period the project team focused on leveling the playing field for decentralization champions from many sectors – government, NGOs, education, and the news media – and from local and central/capital city levels. The team sought private sector (Internet Service Providers) participation through discounted fees for participants.

Anglophone DDialogue has grown beyond Ghana through the work of institutional and individual participants. Institutional partners include the Institute for Local Government Studies (ILGS), which promotes DDialogue through national and regional activities; the Ghana Institute for Management and Public Administration (GIMPA), partially funded by the World Bank; the National Association for Local Authorities of Ghana (NALAG), a member of the African Union of Local Authorities (AULA); the Ghana Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development; and, Community Learning Centers (CLC) in Cape Coast and Kumasi. These institutional networks, coupled with the efforts of individuals, have engaged participants from Lesotho, Madagascar, Nigeria, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

It was not envisioned that the Anglophone DDialogue would be institutionalized in a regional institution, such as the PDM, at this stage of development. Participants have stated that the geographical location of the DDialogue "host" is not as critical as its ongoing existence. NALAG has suggested that AULA assume the leadership role and, with other institutional partners, stands ready to pursue this or other options. RTI continues to host the Anglophone DDialogue web site at its U.S. facilities and can continue to provide hosting for a period to be determined with EDDI leadership.

*Local Governance University (LGU)* was piloted in 1999 with Leland Initiative support for a local government financial management course conducted in-person and on the web in Ghana's

Central Region. The Cape Coast CLC and Central Region Coordinating Council co-hosted the class by providing facilities and logistical support.  Students included regional and district professionals in finance, budget, planning, and general management.

Based on the ease and enthusiasm with which students took to web-based learning and the encouragement of USAID/Ghana, EDDI provided support for ongoing work in Ghana, 1999-2001. RTI engaged representatives of local and national governments, NGOs, and academia to develop a priority learning agenda and to deliver two classes in the key areas of Financial Management and Citizen Participation. RTI developed and delivered LGU classes with Ghanaian professionals, melding international and local experience. Classes included in-person and on-line (web and e-mail) interaction using printed materials, a virtual campus located at www.rtilgu.org, and virtual classrooms on www.blackboard.com

Twelve of 16 district and regional finance and planning professionals from Ashanti and Central regions successfully completed the finance class conducted by RTI, ILGS, and GIMPA. In conjunction with a DDialogue Roundtable and Ribbon Cutting, Ghana's Minister of Local Government and Rural Development recognized graduates.

Thirty participants from Kumasi Metro local government, NGOs, business, education, and media participated in the citizen participation class and continue work on a resultant community initiative to clean up the marketplace. Due to intense interest in citizen participation, class observers included representatives of USAID/Ghana, ILGS, the European Union (EU), NALAG, Accra Metro, and USAID/Ghana's local government program implementing partners, the Cooperative League of the USA (CLUSA) and African Centre for Human Development (ACHD).  On-line work was conducted in partnership with the Kumasi CLC.

From the outset, Francophone and Anglophone DDialogue and LGU have:

- Engaged local institutions and technical consultants to facilitate and champion work. RTI has provided overall project management and technical assistance with a continual eye to the importance of the development of local ownership, leadership, and expertise.

- Assumed that effective use of the Internet must include attention to three critical areas:

  1. *Provision of useful information and services.* For example, DDialogue and LGU systems allow participants to share information and experience on-line – in real time and without Webmaster intervention – on the assumption that participants are best equipped to determine what is useful.

  2. *Access* to computers, Internet connections, training and support, DDialogue web content, and decision-making about how DDialogue and LGU are shaped and how they grow. Internet access in the Francophone DDialogue initially involved payment of ISP fees. Anglophone DDialogue access has focused on partnerships with CLCs, GIMPA, and ISPs to promote reliable and affordable access.

  3. *Communication and promotion*, with a focus on developing and recognizing regional champions. Recognition activities include in-person roundtables, personal attention, and engagement of the news media, t-shirts, and other promotions that promote awareness, identity, and ownership.

**Key Lessons**

1. Sustainability of innovative systems, such as DDialogue and LGU, demand strategic activities – at the outset – to integrate use into local organizations' business plans.

For long term sustainability both DDialogue and LGU need to have local (African) ownership. Early on RTI identified PDM as a strong candidate to host DDialogue. Its regional focus and mission to support decentralization and improved local governance meld perfectly with the goals of DDialogue. The PDM has the contacts and context to continue DDialogue. In fact, although there is no current outside funding for Ddialogue, the PDM has recently initiated a discussion forum entitled "Décentralisation, Acteurs locaux et Enjeux fonciers en Afrique". PDM has indicated its strong support for continuing DDialogue, however it is clear that they could do more with continued funding in order to do the outreach and promotion necessary to make the Dialogue grow. Their current network in the region means they already have an audience identified. Funding for national and regional face-to-face meetings and for a coordinator to facilitate electronic exchanges would help in sustaining DDialogue. In addition, funds would help in getting more information posted to the website. We know that people are interested in the useful information they can find on the website. As access continues to improve in Africa the chances increase of people being able to more easily log on to the site.

Another path for DDialogue sustainability would be to more fully integrate the functions of DDialogue website into the PDM's website (www.pdm-net.org). PDM has a website with very rich base of information updated regularly. However, their site could have much more information readily accessible to users (such as documents being available for download over the web rather than having to order hard copies). Other DDialogue functions which could be integrated into PDM's site include the discussion forum, and dynamic features that allow participants to directly post news items, library documents, and website links. These types of features make the Dialogue unique because they empower the participants to share their knowledge and show them just how easy it can be done with this technology. Many of DDialogue's members are first time users of Internet and web technology. When they see that they can immediately post their name and address to the site and add a news item they become very excited about the potential of the technology.

This type of move would, while subsuming the "DDialogue" identity into PDM's identity, do away with the issue of competing functions of DDialogue and PDM websites. For example, both sites have library documents such as decentralization laws. Rather than attempt to copy documents to both sites they would only need to be uploaded to one site.

RTI's consultant based in Benin remains the primary mover in engaging participants and working to overcome telecommunications and other technical challenges. While individuals have easily mastered use of the web and e-mail, they have not naturally incorporated use into their work even when they have reliable Internet access.

2. Facilitating public-private partnerships to bolster Internet access – instead of wholly or partially subsidizing access – holds the best potential for broadening access as supportive regulatory environments and markets evolve. Attention to building and mobilizing demand outside major markets increases the pressure on telecommunications providers and regulators and catalyzes innovative approaches.

We have seen significant access improvement in capital cities and other major markets since 1997. But connections remain beyond the reach of most institutional and individual budgets. When asked, the private sector has responded with discounted fees for DDialogue and LGU participants and with proposals for partnerships that move service to communities ahead of market plans.

Without efforts to promote access, on-line activities are necessarily weighted to the advantage of participants from capital cities and major markets.

3.  Continual communication and promotion, through diverse vehicles, are critical to building and broadening awareness and sustaining engagement.  As with lesson #1, communication and promotion strategy and activities should be designed at the outset in collaboration with leader institutions and integrated into their standard business activities.

RTI found low-cost recognition and promotion activities, such as distributing t-shirts and caps, increased participation, teamwork and pride. Inclusion of the news media as genuine participants – and not merely through news conferences and coverage of events – raised journalists' awareness of decentralization and local governance issues and prompted discussions of how they can improve decentralization and local government coverage, especially outside capital cities. Inclusion of the media also provided low-cost promotion to targeted and broad audiences.

4.  Web systems that allow participants to share information, experience and views directly and in real time increase use and local ownership while reinforcing the principles of decentralization and participatory governance.

5.  Demand for information and experience about the basics – the nuts and bolts of effective local government finance, particularly revenue generation, and citizen participation – is high.

Interest in these topics is evidenced by the quantity and quality of DDialogue contributions on these topics. Working with RTI's Ghanaian representative, CLUSA will integrate the LGU citizen participation approach and materials (in-person only) in its USAID local government program. ILGS is working to integrate the course through an EU supported program.

6.  On-line learning is delivered most effectively through a mix of in-person and on-line work and in full partnership with established institutions of learning, such as ILGS and universities. Current and potential LGI participants stress the need for formal credits.


**Sustaining DDialogue and LGU**

RTI's recommended approach to sustainability of DDialogue and LGU focuses on support of three key results over two years. Brief descriptions and illustrative activities follow.

**Result 1.**   DDialogue and LGU are integrated into existing African institutions.

*Francophone DDialogue:* RTI recommends very limited technical assistance over six months to solidify PDM leadership and Francophone DDialogue systems. We would work with PDM to: (1) integrate Francophone DDialogue operation and ongoing promotion into PDM's business

plan and standard systems, (2) monitor and support DDialogue web services and telecommunications systems to support reliability and ongoing development, and (3) encourage participation among EDDI and USAID programs in the region.

RTI's Benin representative, Mr. Yaovi Atohoun, would provide primary support working 10 days/month with on-line assistance from RTI/NC. RTI/NC personnel would provide technical assistance with business planning, communication, and promotion through on-line collaboration with Mr. Atohoun and PDM and one, trip to Benin. We do not recommend additional funding for subcontracting with PDM.

*Anglophone DDialogue:* RTI recommends institutionalization in an existing African institution, such as AULA, with intensive upfront work to ensure DDialogue is fully integrated into the organization's near- and long-term business, communications, financial, and ICT plans. All activities would be conducted with and through the lead institution.

Work would focus on building DDialogue participation in southern Africa, maintaining participation in West Africa, and joining the regions, primarily, through on-line interaction. We envision one start-up roundtable that joins western and southern Africa participants and one additional joint roundtable conducted after one year. In the interim, in-person DDialogue roundtables should be conducted within countries and regions as part of regularly scheduled events.

AULA's network of country associations and demonstrated commitment to on-line sharing of information and experience make it a strong candidate for leadership.  We recommend that work with EDDI partners, as described in Result 3, promote participation of decentralization champions from the NGO and education sectors.

*LGU*: The demand and enthusiasm for on-line learning, particularly in local government management basics and in citizen participation, are clear. LGU's sustainability beyond single interventions, however, depends upon institutionalization within accredited African institutions. RTI recommends work with EDDI leadership to identify 2-3 existing institutions, ideally in the EDDI and Leland networks, as targets for mainstreaming LGU.

**Result 2.**　　Partnerships promote reliable and affordable Internet access and DDialogue and LGU participation beyond capital cities and other major markets.

LGU and Anglophone DDialogue have emphasized inclusion of local government and non-governmental decentralization champions from within and outside capital cities.  RTI recommends continued support for access activities that catalyze public-private partnerships and promote use of community CLCs and telecenters.

**Result 3.**　　Increased emphasis on DDialogue communication and promotion, including introduction and sharing of experience throughout the EDDI partners network.

Increased attention to promotion of DDialogue through the EDDI network and USAID programs, including Missions, is needed to broaden participation beyond government and limited engagement of representatives in other sectors. Key activities would include documentation of

experience, broad dissemination through print and on-line vehicles, and introduction of DDialogue through EDDI partner events.

Technical leadership and facilitation in all result areas would maximize the involvement of African professionals who have been involved in DDialogue and LGU and on the significant expertise that exists within the EDDI partners network.

**Summary**

RTI is prepared to provide additional information, including projected costs. We have confidence in the sustainability of DDialogue and LGU over the long haul and look forward to further discussions with EDDI.